

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /058 W
-----252151Z 041159 /75-61
R 251500Z JAN 77
FM AMCONSUL TRIESTE
TO SECSTATE WASH DC 0587
INFO ROME 0351

C O N F I D E N T I A L TRIESTE 0021

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IT

SUBJ: THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCI) IN NORTHEASTERN ITALY

1. SUMMARY. THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCI) CONTINUES TO CHIP AWAY AT HERETOFORE SEEMINGLY IMPREGNABLE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC (DC) FORTRESSES OF FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA AND THE VENETO; THE TWO REGIONS ACCOUNT FOR 11 OF ITALY'S 93 PROVINCES AND ABOUT 10 PCT OF ITALY'S POPULATION, AREA, AND GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT, AND OCCUPY STRATEGIC REAL ESTATE ON ITALY'S SENSITIVE BORDERS WITH YUGOSLAVIA AND AUSTRIA. THE DC WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE FRIULI AND VENETO POLITICS FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, BUT, IN SOME CASES IT MAY DO SO AT COMMUNIST FOREBEARANCE. FIRM PCI FOOTHOLDS IN VENICE/MESTRE, TRIESTE AND ROVIGO AND INCREASING DC RELIANCE ON PCI NEUTRALITY TO REMAIN IN POWER EVEN IN AREAS WHERE DC HAS MAJORITY

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ARE SIGNS OF THE TIMES. FURTHER LOCAL GAINS BY PCI CAN ONLY ADD SUBSTANCE TO ITS CLAIM OF BROAD-BASED SUPPORT AMONG ALL ELEMENTS OF ITALIAN SOCIETY (EVEN IN TWO OF THE MOST TRADITIONAL DC REGIONS OF ITALY) WHILE REREINFORCING POPULAR PERCEPTIONS OF A DC UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO DEFEND ITSELF IN ITS OWN STRONGHOLDS OR TO DO THE NECESSARY TO REGAIN THE ELECTORATE'S CONFIDENCE. THE NEXT LOCAL TESTS OF PCI APPEAL WILL BE THE TRIESTE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS LATER THIS YEAR
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AND FRIULI REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN 1978. END SUMMARY.
2. THE PCI CLAIMS MEMBERSHIP GAINS OF THE THREE AND SIX PCT OVER 1975 IN THE REGIONS OF THE FRIULI AND THE VENETO RESPECTIVELY WITH A TOTAL OF 100,000 ON THE PCI MEMBERSHIP ROLLS IN 1976. PCI MEMBERS ARE FOR THE MOST PART DRAWN FROM THE PORT AND INDUSTRIAL AREAS OF TRIESTE, VENICE/MESTRE, AND THE PERENIALLY DEPRESSED AREA OF ROVIGO, WHERE THE PCI AS A MASS, URBAN,

INDUSTRIAL WORKER PARTY HAS SUBSTANTIAL APPEAL. HOWEVER, THAT SAME IMAGE HAS DONE LITTLE FOR THE PARTY AMONG THE SMALL LAND-HOLDERS AND ARTISANS IMBUED WITH STRONG TRADITIONAL CATHOLIC VIEWS IN THE ESSENTIALLY RURAL AREAS OF FRIULI AND THE VENETO. (THE DC WON MORE THAN 50 PCT OF THE VOTE IN 1976 IN THE PRO-

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VINCES OF PADUA, TREVISO, VERONA, AND VICENZA)

3. NEVERTHELESS THE PCI, WHILE STILL UNABLE TO MATCH LOCALLY ITS NATIONAL ELECTION AVERAGES, HAS MADE SUBSTANTIAL GAINS HERE: FRIULI -- 28 PCT OF THE VOTE IN 1976 (21 PCT IN 1972); VENETO -- 25 PCT OF THE VOTE IN 1976 (19 PCT IN 1972). (THE DC IN THE SAME YEARS RESPECTIVELY SLIPPED FROM 43 TO 42 PCT AND 52 TO 50 PCT OF THE TOTAL VOTE)

4. AT LOCAL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT (REGIONAL, PROVINCIAL, MUNICIPAL). THE DC IS THE DOMINANT LOCAL POLITICAL FORCE. IT HEADS THE FRIULI AND VENETO REGIONAL GIUNTAS, BUT IN FRIULI THE PCI PARLAYED THE EARTHQUAKE AND THE OSIMO TREATY INTO THE CREATION OF TWO COMMITTEES WHICH HOLD NEAR VETO POWER OVER THE GIUNTA ON THESE TWO ISSUES. IN THE PROVINCES, A PCI/PSI ALLIANCE GOVERNS VENICE (PROVINCE AND CITY) AND THERE IS A STALEMATE WITH THE DC IN ROVIGO. MOST OTHER PROVINCES ARE GOVERNED BY THE DC IN VARIOUS COMBINATIONS RANGING FROM ALL-DC MINORITY GOVERNMENTS TO COALITIONS WITH THE REPUBLICANS (PRI) AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (PSDI). IN TREVISO, THE DC, DESPITE ITS MAJORITY POSITION, HAS SIGNED A PROGRAMMATIC ACCORD WITH ALL PARTIES EXCEPT THE MSI AND A SIMILAR FORMULA MAY BE IN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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CARDS FOR THE TRIESTE PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS. TREND MAY SPREAD TO OTHER PROVINCES AS WELL.

5. AS FOREGOING ILLUSTRATES, PCI APPROACH TO POWER AT LOCAL LEVELS IS ALSO A CAUTIOUS ONE WHICH ESCHEWS CONFRONTATION AND PLACES A HEAVY PREMIUM ON COOPERATION WITH THE DC. MOREOVER, "CONFRONTO" AND "NON SFIDUCIA" (NO-LACK OF CONFIDENCE) WHICH ARE OPERATIVE MODELS FOR DC RELATION WITH THE PCI IN ROME HAVE HAD A DELETERIOUS IMPACT ON BASICALLY HEALTHY AND FEISTY LOCAL DC ORGANIZATIONS. IN FRIULI AND THE VENETO, THE DC SEEMS TO BE PUTTING A FIRM ACCENT ON YOUTH IN LOCAL COMMITMENTS TO NATIONAL PARTY GOALS OF RENEWAL AND REFORM. HOWEVER, IF THIS COMMITMENT IS NOT EFFECTIVELY SHARED BY NATIONAL DC LEADERSHIP, LOCAL EFFORTS TO DO THE NECESSARY ARE UNLIKELY TO SUCCEED.

6. MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ARE SCHEDULED FOR TRIESTE LATER THIS YEAR AND FRIULI REGIONAL ELECTIONS WILL TAKE PLACE IN 1978.

OUTCOMES WILL TURN ON SUCH PAROCHIAL MATTERS AS DC PERFORMANCE
IN EARTHQUAKE RELIEF EFFORT AND ITS ABILITY TO CONTINUE TO
SATISFY TRIESTE'S ESOTERIC POLITICAL FORCES. NEVERTHELESS,
RESULTS WILL HAVE NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE IN VIEW OF THE TWO
REGIONS' NOMINAL AND EFFECTIVE IMPORTANCE IN THE DC SCHEME OF THINGS.

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7. OUTLOOK FOR THE FRIULI AND THE VENETO: PCI IS GROWING
LOCALLY FOR MUCH THE SAME REASONS IT HAS DONE SO NATIONALLY:
THE DC HAS BEEN IN POWER FOR 30 SOME YEARS AND THERE IS A
PERCEIVED NEED AMONG MANY FOR CHANGE; ECONOMIC CRISIS AND
AUSTERITY HAVE ALSO LEFT THEIR MARK FAVORING A PCI PUBLICLY
COMMITTED TO DEMOCRATIC PLURALISM. THE DC'S ABILITY TO RESIST
THE PCI SOFT SELL WILL DEPEND IN LARGE MEASURE ON WHETHER IT
CAN PURSUE A POLICY OF "CONFRONTO" WITH THE PCI IN ROME WITHOUT
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UNDERMINING FURTHER VIGOROUS LOCAL DC ORGANIZATIONS FOR WHOM
SUCH A POLICY HAS LIMITED APPLICABILITY AT BEST. MOEN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, COMMUNISTS, POLITICAL PARTIES, POLITICAL SITUATION
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977TRIEST00021
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Format: TEL
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Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
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Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3502476
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCI) IN NORTHEASTERN ITALY
TAGS: PINT, IT, PCI, DC
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c43d08d1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009